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Authoritarian Resilience in Morocco after the Arab Spring: A Critical Assessment of Educational Exchanges in Soft Power

Abstract

The aim of this article is to critically assess Joseph Nye's claims about student exchange programmes by examining the impact of Morocco's educational relationship with the EU on the kingdom's political development during and since the Arab Spring. Nye maintains that such schemes are important sources of soft power which Western countries can use to promote their values – including that of democracy – in the societies of the visiting students. Despite tens of thousands of its citizens enrolling in European universities each year, however, Morocco is scarcely any more democratic today than it was when the Arab Spring began. The article considers what the country's non-democratisation means for the EU's soft power and this facet of Nye's thesis.

Keywords

Morocco; European Union; Nye; soft power; education; democracy

Introduction

A key facet of Joseph Nye's theory of soft power is the temporary movement of scholars and students from countries that the West wishes to influence to the United States and Europe as part of educational exchange programmes. According to Nye, these schemes encourage and enable face-to-face contact between important groups of (mainly) young people and the societies to which they travel. Through this contact, participants are exposed to the values of these societies which they then disseminate to their compatriots (with varying degrees of deliberateness and efficacy) once they return home. Nye argues that these individuals are the ideal bearers of the West's principles and ideals as their socio-economic backgrounds (as evidenced by their abilities to travel abroad), and educations and qualifications (gained, in part, through their participation in these exchanges) make them more likely to secure important positions back home from which they can influence their respective societies. Educational exchange programmes, therefore, are an important means by which the West can inculcate its political and other values in rival populations and influence their development.

The aim of this article is to interrogate this claim. It does so by assessing the impact of Morocco's strong educational ties to Europe on the kingdom's political development since the Arab Spring. These links are well-established and extensive and should, according to Nye and in keeping with the bloc's ostensible commitment to promoting and protecting democracy and human rights at home and abroad, give the EU significant soft power over the country with which to encourage its political liberalisation. Yet Morocco has emerged from the Arab Spring scarcely any more democratic than when the protests began. The article argues, therefore, that the kingdom's non-democratisation not only raises serious doubts about the utility of strong educational ties as a source of soft power, but also, by extension, the validity of this facet of Nye's thesis in regards to Morocco and its North African neighbours.

Thus, the article contributes to the large body of work that critically engages with Nye's thesis. Niall Ferguson (2003) questions the utility of soft power, arguing that its main problem is that 'its, well soft'. Janice Bially Mattern (2005, 591) identifies an important tension in Nye's

explanation of how soft power is supposed to work, noting that he ‘theorizes attraction as a natural objective experience when he describes the allegedly universally attractive values of cosmopolitanism, democracy, and peace’, but then ‘implies that ... [it] is a social construct [when] he emphasizes the utility of public diplomacy for “converting” foreigners so that they become attracted to one’s own values’. And Steven Lukes (2005, 490) highlights its imprecision, maintaining that Nye’s explanation fails ‘to distinguish between different ways of securing compliance through persuasion ... which can either mean the securing of conviction or inducing of assent by non-rational means’, or ‘between different modes of co-optation, different ways in which preferences can be shaped and “self-definition” induced.’

This article differs from these existing analyses in the way that it assesses Nye’s thesis. For it is the first study to draw on Morocco’s educational links to Europe and ongoing failure to democratise to expose the limits of the EU’s soft power over the kingdom and challenge this aspect of Nye’s thesis. Thus, the article charts and then applies his arguments to Morocco’s relationship with the EU before questioning their explanatory prowess. The article does not, therefore, dispute the validity of these arguments in the first instance; it does not question or reject the assumptions, suppositions or beliefs on which they are based. Rather, it reaches its critical conclusions *after* applying them to Morocco and on the basis of the country’s political development over the last few years. Its main findings are that Nye’s thesis is too permissive, too linear, too fatalistic and too objectifying. Equally, in taking this approach, the article does not automatically reject the often perceptive and incisive points made by Lukes (2005), Bially Mattern (2005) and others. Rather, it tries to do something different from them, namely, to test and evaluate the explanatory power of Nye’s theory in the context of Morocco and the modern Maghreb.

The article adopts Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way’s (2010, 6) understanding of democracy because of the fifth attribute they add to the widely-accepted ‘procedural-minimum’ definition. For them, and this article, therefore, democracy depends on: ‘(1) free, fair and competitive elections; (2) full adult suffrage; (3) broad protection of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, press, and association; (4) the absence of nonelected “tutelary” authorities (e.g., militaries, monarchies, or religious bodies) that limit elected officials’ power to govern’ and (5) ‘the existence of a reasonably level playing field between incumbents and opposition’ (Levitsky and Way 2010, 5-6).

Furthermore, the article draws no functional distinction between the soft power of the European Union and that of its member states, but assumes that each nationally organised exchange programme generates capacity for Brussels. This merging of resources is justified on the basis that the EU does not require the participants in its own schemes to attend only those higher education establishments that it operates (such as the European University Institute).¹ Instead, those involved are free to enrol at almost any university in the EU. This merging also matches what takes place *within* countries as many ‘soft power resources are separate from the ... government and ... only partly responsive to its purposes’ (Nye, 2004a, 15). Nearly every soft power regimen, therefore, incorporates and depends on capabilities which lie beyond the direct and total control of the political leaders who are trying to generate and use this power.

To sustain this analysis and argument, the article is divided into three main parts. In the first, it gives an overview of Nye’s understanding of soft power and student exchange programmes. In the second, it highlights the strength of Morocco’s educational ties to the EU by

measuring the number of the country's citizens enrolled at European universities. And in the third, it demonstrates the failure of the Arab Spring to bring about the kingdom's political liberalisation before then considering the implications of the country's non-democratisation for Nye's theory.

Soft Power: An Overview of Nye's Thesis

Joseph Nye argues that, even though soft power is bound to and informed by hard power and influence, it remains distinct from them both. Hard power is 'usually associated with command behavior' (Nye 2004a, 7), which refers to a country's ability 'to change what others *do*' (emphasis original Nye 1990, 267). It tends, therefore, to rely on more coercive methods including the use of physical force and the offering of economic inducements (Nye 1990, 267). Influence, on the other hand, is about persuasion or a country's capacity to convince others to modify their behaviour and take new courses of action. And while it is less closely associated with coercion than hard power, it can nevertheless be generated by means 'of threats or payments' (Nye 2004a, 7).

Soft power is linked to hard power in a variety of ways. First, 'they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one's purpose by affecting ... behavior' (Nye 2004a, 7). That is, they each refer to practices by which countries shape what others do in ways that are beneficial to themselves. Second, 'all power depends on context ... [on] who relates to whom under what circumstances' (Nye 2004a, 16). Thus, the effectiveness of each is determined by external factors, by the environments and situations in which they are exercised. And third, some forms of soft power are corollaries of hard power. They depend on a country possessing a strong military or economy which it then uses to entice others into following its example (Nye 2004a, 7-8).

Yet these synergies also engender risks and vulnerabilities as a country's unthinking, ill-timed or misjudged application of one form of power can prevent or impair its effective use of the other. For, just as a state 'that courts popularity may be loath to exercise ... hard power', so another 'that throws its weight around without regard to the effects on its soft power may find others' obstructing its use of command methods (Nye 2004a, 25). Indeed, both forms of power need to be employed appropriately: on the right occasions, at suitable junctures, and to sufficient, but not excessive, extent. The overzealous or imprudent practice of hard power, therefore, can disrupt and 'interfere' (Nye 2004a, 25) with the successful use of soft power.

As well as having the potential to destabilise each other's application, hard and soft power are exercised in different ways. While a country's possession of a formidable military or a strong economy might present it with unique opportunities to wield soft power, it must pursue and exploit these openings by non-command means (Nye 2004a, 7). For its soft power, like that of all countries, rests mainly on three non-coercive resources: 'its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)' (Nye 2004a, 11). Soft power, therefore, utilises and relies on an alternative set of practices and mechanisms.

Nye maintains that culture is conveyed through human interaction. It is communicable, relying on individuals and groups meeting, speaking and learning about one another. This leads him to identify student exchange programmes as an especially important means of promoting and arranging contact, of orchestrating and enabling the exposure of citizens (often young people) of one country to the traditions and values of another. For Nye, both the quality and quantity of

participants in these programmes matter. He notes with approval that ‘most of China’s leaders have a son or daughter educated in the States who can portray a realistic view of the United States that is often at odds with the caricatures in official Chinese propaganda’ (Nye 2004b, 42). These students are important because they have influence, most notably on their families and friends who hold positions of power and responsibility in a country of great concern to the US. Furthermore, such participants are particularly well placed, because of their contacts, educations and qualifications, to secure ‘positions where they can affect policy outcomes that are important to Americans’ (Nye 2004b, 43). Such students, therefore, are of enduring value to the US or whichever country that hosts them. By extension, the exchange programmes that bring them over represent wise investments capable of delivering many and varied soft power benefits time and again.

In addition to these high worth individuals, these initiatives can, either independently or in conjunction with others, facilitate the movement of significant numbers of people. Nye (2005, 14) observes that ‘from 1958 to 1988, 50,000 Russians visited the United States as part of formal exchange programs’. And while ‘American skeptics at the time feared’ that the participants would “steal us blind”, they ‘failed to notice that the visitors vacuumed up political ideas along with ... secrets’ (Nye 2005, 14). Thus, the programmes helped disseminate concepts and values that were as threatening to the USSR as they were integral to the US to tens of thousands of Soviet citizens. And in achieving this mass effect, the programmes maximised the spread of American soft power.

And herein lies the crucial difference between influence and soft power. While both depend on ‘persuasion or the ability to move people by argument’ (Nye 2004a, 6), soft power also works through attraction, by enticing others to want to act more like whomever is exercising it. In so doing, it is often able to generate acquiescence (Nye 2004a, 6), to get others to willingly change their behaviour and shift their positions. Unlike influence, therefore, soft power is never exercised by means of command and instead relies on ‘attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the[ir] achievement’ to have effect (Nye 2004a, 7).

Effective soft power, therefore, has two pre-conditions. One is the values a ‘country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way, it handles its relations with others’ (Nye 2004a, 8). Only by living up to the standards and principles it claims to cherish can a state become the sort of affirmative model that can attract others and thereby persuade them to change their behaviour. Crucially, a country not only needs to maintain these standards for much of the time, but do so across most areas of policy and action. It is not enough to abide by certain principles at home only to disregard them when acting abroad. For ‘domestic or foreign policies that appear to be hypocritical, arrogant, indifferent to the opinion of others, or based on a narrow approach to national interests’ (Nye 2004a, 14) will only weaken a country’s appeal as a role model. Such values also need resilience: to continue informing a state’s conduct even when it is confronted by dangers that challenge these tenets and encourage their rejection.

The other pre-condition is the readiness of a target state – the object of whatever soft power is being exercised – to change. ‘All power depends on context’, but soft power especially so as it needs ‘willing interpreters and receivers’ (Nye 2004a, 16) to be able to take effect. Indeed, it is defined by its ability to attract others. It simply cannot operate if no-one lets it, if countries

do not allow themselves to be drawn to the example of whomever is employing it. The subject or agent of this power, therefore, must generate and maintain a receptive audience.

Doing so, however, is no easy feat, not least as ‘many soft power resources are separate from the ... government and ... only partly responsive to its purposes’ (Nye 2004a, 15). While a regime must ensure that it remains true to whatever values it claims to cherish and represent, it does not have total control over the processes by which the country’s broader culture – in which these ideals are embedded – are either produced or promoted. In addition to the wide range of domestic groups involved in these procedures, scores of international actors may have parts to play if any ‘universal values’ (Nye 2004a, 11) are incorporated in a culture. It is in the interests of countries’ to draw upon and embrace such global norms as doing so gives them wider appeal and, by extension, more soft power (Nye 2004a, 11).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given how diffused and multifaceted the processes of cultural production and promotion are, governments occasionally struggle ‘to control and employ soft power’ (Nye 2004a, 11). And while these travails do not ‘diminish its importance’ (Nye 2004a, 8), they do help determine how it works. For ‘though soft power sometimes has direct effects on specific’ aims, ‘it is more likely to have an impact on the general goals that a country seeks’ (Nye 2004a, 16). That is, it is often more successful helping states achieve “milieu ... [ambitions],” like shaping an environment conducive to democracy’ than “possession” (Nye 2004a, 16-17) ones which tend to be more precise, focused and time-sensitive. Soft power, then, is not only difficult to harness but also to direct, and is at its most effective when used to shape broader contexts.

Democracy promotion, though, is arguably an inevitable corollary of Western soft power. Not only are many of the rights and values on which it is based indistinguishable from those embraced and advocated by European and North American countries, but since the end of the Cold War it has achieved ascendancy over all other forms of government. As Levitsky and Way (2010, 17) note, the demise and disappearance of the Soviet Union ‘created an “almost universal wish to imitate a way of life associated with the liberal capitalist democracies of the core regimes,” which encouraged the diffusion of Western democratic models.’ Their spread was also stimulated by the ‘instrumental logic’ that developed in response to the concentration of most of the world’s remaining ‘external assistance’ resources in Western hands (Levitsky and Way 2010, 17). Democracy, therefore, is part of the prevailing global norms which have been heavily influenced by the West.

The ability of soft power to achieve change within states depends in part on the types of regime that they have. For it tends to be most effective in countries where political ‘power is dispersed ... rather than concentrated’ (Nye 2004a, 16). While dictators and other authoritarian governments cannot afford to be ‘totally indifferent to the views’ (Nye 2004a, 16) of their citizens, they are often able to downplay or ignore the popularity of those countries seeking their cooperation while they decide whether to acquiesce or not. Their greater political powers grant them more time and space in which to consider their options and determine whether they are willing to allow themselves to comply with the soft power being put on them. In democracies, however, ‘where public opinion and parliaments matter, political leaders have less leeway to adopt tactics and strike deals’ (Nye 2004a, 16). In such instances, the widespread appeal of another country can encourage the population to put pressure on its own government to cooperate. Soft power can achieve effect, therefore, by working on and enticing ordinary people. That is, the extent of its influence is not limited to politicians and governments.

Soft power's ability to reach beyond political leaders and ruling elites has only been enhanced since the advent of the information age. And the 'countries that are likely to be more attractive and gain soft power ... are those with multiple channels of communication that help to frame issues; whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to prevailing global norms (which now emphasize liberalism, pluralism, and autonomy); and whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international values and policies' (Nye 2004a, 31-32). Soft power's importance, therefore, will almost certainly increase in the future.

The Strength of Morocco's Educational Links to Europe

When measured in student exchanges, Morocco's educational ties to the European Union are not only well-established and strong, but more numerous and robust than those of its nearest neighbours. As of 2014, 8.6 percent of all its students were enrolled at universities abroad, compared to 5 percent of Tunisia's and 1.7 percent of Algeria's (UNESCO 2016). Of this total, 89.37 percent were registered at institutions in the EU as opposed to 82.49 percent of the Tunisians and 85.84 percent of the Algerians studying overseas (UNESCO 2016). A higher proportion of a greater number of Moroccans, therefore, continue to pursue their educations in the European Union. Indeed, there are more of them studying in the EU (34,494) than there are Tunisians (13,932) and Algerians (17,765) combined (31,697) (UNESCO 2016).²

The clear majority of Moroccans studying in the European Union (83.2 percent) are enrolled at institutions in France (25,223), Spain (3,071), Germany (2,291) and Italy (1,583) (UNESCO 2016). These countries represent the top four destinations for Moroccan students worldwide. Most of those who study in the EU are based in France. It is home to two out of every three of the students (65.35 percent) who make up this overseas cadre (UNESCO 2016). Furthermore, it has long been their favoured destination. Not only have more Moroccans studied there than anywhere else in each of the last 10 academic years, but they have consistently comprised the largest contingent of foreign nationals registered at its universities and other tertiary-level institutions over the same period (Institute of International Education 2016).

Morocco's ties to Spain are similarly important, albeit on a smaller scale. For it is equally well established as the second most favoured destination of Moroccan students studying abroad. And even though the number of them enrolled in its higher education institutions has slowly decreased over the past decade in relation to those from other countries, they still constitute one of the largest national contingents in its universities (UNESCO 2016).³ This is also true of the Moroccan student community in Germany which, having been the seventh largest in the 2007-2008 academic year, now does not feature in the top 10. Yet this relative decline is not repeated everywhere. In the UK – the eleventh most popular overseas destination for Moroccan students – the national contingent nearly doubled in size between 2010 and 2015 (UNESCO 2016). Despite these shifts and fluctuations, the flow of students to France continues to grow almost annually (Institute of International Education 2016). Thus, Morocco's strong educational links to Europe are maintained and burnished.

And at least some of those who study in Europe and elsewhere in the West secure positions of power and influence, of the type that Nye suggests, once the return home. Indeed, of the current members of government (May 2017) Nabil Benadballah (Minister of National Planning, Urban Planning, Housing and Urban Policy), Mohamed Boussaid (Minister of the Economy and Finance), Mohamed Hassad (Minister of National Education, Vocational

Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research), Abdelouafi Laftit (Minister of the Interior), Mohamid Sajid (Minister of Tourism, Air Transport, Crafts and the Social Economy), Abdelkrim Benoutiq (Deputy Minister to Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Mohammed Ben Abdelkader (Minister Delegate to the Head of the Government, Civil Service), Nouredinne Boutayeb (Minister Delegate to the Head of the Government, National Defence), Mohamed Najib Boulif (Minister Delegate to the Minister of the Interior), Lachen Daoudi (Minister Delegate to the Head of the Government, General Affairs and Governance), Larbi Bencheikh (Secretary of State to the Minister of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research), Mbarka Bouaida (Secretary of State to the Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, and Water and Forests), Lamina Boutaleb (Secretary of State to the Minister of Tourism, Air Transport, Crafts and the Social Economy), Rkia Derham (Secretary of State to the Minister of Industry, Investment, Trade and the Digital Economy), Othmane El Feradous (Secretary of State to the Minister of Industry, Investment, Trade and the Digital Economy), Nezha El Ouafi (Secretary of State to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Sustainable Development), and Hamou Ouhedi (Secretary of State to the Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, and Water and Forests) all studied in Europe,⁴ and Aziz Akhannouch (Minister of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, and Water and Forests), Rachid Talbi Alami (Minister of Youth and Sports), Moulay Hafid Elalmy (Minister of Industry, Investment, Trade and the Digital Economy), Mustapha Khalfi (Deputy Minister to the Head of the Government) and Aziz Rebbah (Minister of Energy, Mines and Sustainable Development) in North America.⁵ Indeed, of the 39 members of the country's government, 22 (56 percent) completed at least some of their higher education in either Europe or North America.

The EU has made clear its support for these exchanges in its latest policy frameworks for the region and by its decision to increase its investment in the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus programmes. The Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity (PfDSP) seeks to create more 'opportunities for exchanges and people-to-people contacts' (especially the young) and to conclude Mobility Partnerships with each of the southern partner states (European Commission 2011a, 3).⁶ Similarly, the New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood promises to develop 'consistent regional initiatives in areas such as trade, energy, transport ... [and] migration' (European Commission and European External Action Service 2011, 2).⁷ With the launch of the PfDSP on 8 March 2011, the EU doubled – to €30 million – the amount of Erasmus Mundus funding it was making available to southern Mediterranean students and academics (European Commission 2011b). And on 1 January 2013, it made an additional €41.7 million available to the southern partners under the Tempus scheme (European Commission 2012, 3).

Crucially, Nye is only concerned with identifying the existence and size of student exchange programmes. He offers no explanation as to how those who take part in these schemes either assimilate the values of the societies in which they are temporarily based, or disseminate these principles once they have returned home. He simply asserts that their exposure to these societies has *some* effect on them and that they, in turn, have *some* effect on their compatriots. He speaks in intuitive but broad terms, and maintains that the more people who take part in a programme the more widely and thoroughly the recipient society's values will be spread to the participants' home states.

When considered from Nye's perspective, therefore, the rotation of so many up-and-coming Moroccans through Europe's universities and colleges each year should give the EU significant soft power over the kingdom. The scale of this movement also speaks of the elevated level of attraction that the EU holds for Morocco, its people and its government. Indeed, successive regimes have actively sought closer relations with Brussels and the bloc. In July 1987, this extended to Rabat formally seeking membership of the then European Community (EC) (Martín 2009, 239).⁸ And even though its application was turned down by the European Council, it has remained undeterred and joined each of the EU's policy frameworks for the region at the earliest opportunity. Not only did it sign its Association Agreement with Brussels just three months after the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) was launched,⁹ but it concluded its Action Plan scarcely seven months after the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was established.¹⁰ Such is Rabat's hunger for ever closer relations with the EU, that on 13 October 2008 it was awarded Advanced Status by Brussels (Martín 2009, 239). To date, it remains the only North African country to be granted this designation.

The EU that so many Moroccans are drawn to is one that proclaims and seeks to promote democracy and human rights. These values are clearly and repeatedly set down in the bloc's various treaties and policy frameworks including those that structure and guide its relations with North Africa. The EMP declares the Council of the European Union's commitment to 'turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation' before arguing that 'guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity [in the region] requires a strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights' (European Union 1995, 1-2). The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) maintains that 'Europe and the Mediterranean countries ... are united by a common ambition: to build together a future of peace, democracy, prosperity and human, social and cultural understanding' (Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat 2008, 9). The ENP also asserts that the 'Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights' and 'wishes to see reinforced, credible and sustained commitment towards democracy, the rule of law, [and] respect for human rights' (Commission of the European Communities 2004, 12 and 11). And the PfDSP argues that the 'European Union has a proud tradition of supporting countries in transition from autocratic regimes to democracy' before promising to help 'all its Southern neighbours who are able and willing to embark on such reforms' (European Commission 2011a, 2). Despite the subtly different degrees of emphasis they each place on political liberalisation, and the EMP's more instrumental view of democracy as the means by which Brussels's will pursue its broader objectives in the region, the frameworks provide consistent affirmation of the EU's commitment to the defence and promotion of civil and human rights throughout the Mediterranean.

Crucially, though, Nye does not reflect in any great depth on the reasons why non-Western students participate in these exchange programmes, on what they hope to achieve by doing so. On the one hand, his disinterest is consistent with the mechanistic approach of his theory. The motivations of these individuals are not especially important – beyond that they are not actively hostile to Western values – as it is their movement between the West and their home countries that truly matters. Thus, the participants in these programmes are cast as indistinct canvasses who expose their compatriots to at least some of the aspects of the Western cultures that have been imprinted upon them during their study trips abroad.

On the other hand, however, this indifference obscures the finer detail of the participants' motivations including what attracts them to these programmes in the first place. The strength of this attraction is clearly inferred by their actions, by their collective decision to further their educations overseas. Yet whether they choose to do so because they are drawn to the cultures and examples of the Western countries in which they are based, or for other reasons – including pragmatic assessments of the employment advantages they will gain at home from earning qualifications abroad – is not considered by Nye.

Nevertheless, from Nye's perspective, the strength of Morocco's educational ties to Europe confirms the presence of each of the elements essential to the production of effective soft power. The numbers of people involved in the exchange programmes, the length of time for which they have been running, and the high degree of attraction Europe holds for many Moroccans (including members of the country's ruling elite) should give the EU considerable soft power over the kingdom with which to promote its values including those of democracy and human rights.

Morocco's Non-Democratisation and the Soft Power Thesis

So why did the EU's soft power fail to bring about Morocco's greater political liberalisation over the period of the Arab Spring? The first protests broke out in the country on 20 February 2011 when up to 200,000 people took to the streets in 53 towns and cities (Barany 2013, 10; Hamblin 2015, 182). These marches, rallies, demonstrations and riots continued – with growing infrequency and decreasing dynamism – for the next 18 months. The king responded quickly to the unrest, delivering – what would prove to be – a crucial public address on 9 March in which he announced the establishment of a Royal Commission to review and recommend changes to the country's constitution.

After completing its assessment on 7 June 2011, the commission's proposals received the overwhelming backing of voters in a referendum held just over three weeks later. Amongst the amendments that were introduced were several small reductions in the king's powers and privileges. Whereas under article 24 of the 1996 constitution he could appoint whomever he wanted as prime minister and to the cabinet (Kingdom of Morocco 1996, article 24), now he is obliged to fill these posts from the ranks of the political party that wins the greatest share of the vote in an election (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 47). And unlike previously, when he was free to dismiss cabinet members and disband the government whenever he wanted, now he must consult with the prime minister before doing so (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 47).

Despite these curbs, however, the king still wields many formidable powers. He continues to preside over the Council of Ministers which is responsible for setting the country's legislative agenda, overseeing its public spending, amending its constitution, reviewing all laws pertaining to its armed forces, declaring war, granting amnesties, and appointing many of its most senior functionaries including the head of its central bank, regional governors and overseas ambassadors (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 48). He remains head of the Superior Council of the Judiciary and retains the right to appoint by decree all the country's magistrates and judges (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, articles 56 and 57). He remains the Supreme Head of the Royal Armed Forces (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 53), and continues to preside over the Superior Council of the Ulema, the one body allowed to comment on religious matters (but only *after* he has given it permission to do so) (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 41). He remains

Commander of the Faithful (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 41), guarantor of the country's permanence and continuity, its supreme arbiter and the living embodiment of its unity (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 42). He retains the right to appoint half of the Constitutional Court's 12 members, including its president (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, article 130), and presides over the Superior Council of Security which was established to improve the coordination of the country's security forces especially at times of national crisis (Kingdom of Morocco 2011, articles 41, 42, 48, 53, 54, 56, 57 and 130).

The king's rights and powers, therefore, are almost as extensive today as they were when the Arab Spring began. What additional obligations are now made of him – most notably to pay closer observance to election results and consult with his prime minister more frequently and on a wider range of issues – do not significantly weaken his control of the country's key institutions. His ongoing centrality to public life inevitably means that Moroccan politics remains similarly unchanged. Thus, for all its soft power and opportunity – as presented by the Arab Spring – the EU has been unable to bring about the kingdom's democratisation. It has failed to exploit fully the considerable soft power it seemingly possesses over the country.

This outcome would seem to pose a serious challenge to Nye's thesis. All the critical ingredients for generating soft power are present, but still the EU cannot achieve the political outcome that it ostensibly wants in accordance with its values. Nye's theory can account for this failure, though, through the importance he attaches to acting consistently and his flexible view of time. He maintains that the effective exercise of soft power depends on countries living up to the values that they claim to cherish and are seeking to promote abroad. They must habitually comport themselves – both domestically and internationally – in accordance with the principles and standards that they wish to propagate through their soft power. Prolonged failure to do so undermines their appeal and exposes them to accusations of hypocrisy and duplicity.

Such charges continue to be levelled at the EU in its dealings with North Africa's governments and leaders (Darbouche 2010, 76; Echagüe, Michou and Mikail 2011, 329). Despite promising to 'develop the rule of law and democracy', foster 'human rights and fundamental freedoms' (European Union 1995, 3), and help 'build ... a future of peace, democracy, prosperity and ... understanding' in the Mediterranean (Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat 2008, 9), the EU has forged and maintained close working relationships with the region's undemocratic regimes. Indeed, it acknowledged doing so in the PfDSP which opens with the declaration that 'the EU must not be a passive spectator', but 'support wholeheartedly the wish of the people in our neighbourhood to enjoy the same freedoms that we take as our right' (European Commission 2011a, 2).

And the EU is still not living up fully to the values expressed in these pledges as it continues to work closely with these regimes. Indeed, in agreeing a Mobility Partnership with Morocco in 2013, it effectively waived the New Response's requirement that significant democratic reforms be introduced first. Despite everything that has happened in North Africa over the past few years and all that it has said in response, the EU continues to treat and interact with Rabat in almost the same ways that it did before the Arab Spring began.

The failure of the EU to leverage its soft power can also be attributed to the timing of the Arab Spring. For Nye, the exercise of soft power is a drawn-out process. Not only does it tend to take place over prolonged periods, but its effects are similarly gradual. It is iterative and accumulative, fostering subtle shifts and gentle changes that slowly make the achievement of what

was hitherto impossible and unlikely, practicable and probable. On this basis, Morocco's emergence from the Arab Spring scarcely any more democratic than what it was when the protests began, does not necessarily mean that the EU's soft power has failed or is failing. The bloc's soft power may still be at work, slowly creating the conditions in which the country's political liberalisation may be advanced. Thus, the Arab Spring is contextualised as a dramatic, but not definitive, episode in a much longer process.

Yet both Nye's view of time and its application to Morocco are problematic. His argument that soft power is most effective in achieving "milieu" ambitions is not only permissive, but also linear, fatalistic and objectifying. His criteria for measuring its impact on a country's political development are sufficiently broad and vague as to enable generous claims about its efficacy to be made. And in granting it a seemingly unlimited period in which to make a difference, he not only ensures that its chances of 'success' are greatly increased, but also linearizes countries' political development by presenting everything that happens there within the overarching explanatory framework of soft power. Thus, political outcomes appear to be preordained, made the inevitable consequences of soft power processes that are relentless and irresistible. And in framing the development of these countries in this way, Nye reduces their agency as they become the objects of Western interests, calculations and power politics. That is, once they are locked into soft power processes they are fated to be shaped and influenced by those wielding the power who remain the subjects of international relations.

When applied to Morocco over the period of the Arab Spring, this interpretation generates at least two troubling dilemmas. The first is over the extent of the EU's soft power and how much the bloc needs to achieve its ambitions in and for the country. And the second is over the amount of time this power needs to take effect. For if the concept is to retain its credibility in the Moroccan context, if it is to preserve any semblance of its explanatory prowess, then the Arab Spring must be understood as a notable phase in a much longer, and ongoing, process of soft power. This process is at least decades old and the Arab Spring comprised the most dramatic and important protests to hit the region in modern times. That the EU's soft power has proved incapable of effecting the sorts of political change that the bloc ostensibly cherishes and is seeking for the country and wider region raises serious doubts about its efficacy.

Furthermore, and as Bially Mattern (2005, 591) has argued, Nye does not pay adequate attention to the cultural origins of the global norms that, he says, Western countries need to tap into if they are to exercise soft power effectively. He fails to consider their roots or properly acknowledge that many of the most important of them – including that of democracy – are manifestations of Europe's and North America's political and economic power in and over the world since the end of the Cold War and before. Thus, he makes no reference to a key cultural feature of his thesis: that Western soft power depends on European and North American governments behaving in accordance with the supposedly universal values and expectations that they impose and maintain. The West's attractiveness to countries like Morocco, therefore, is premised on a global regimen of power which soft power practices seek to reinforce and spread.

Concluding Comments

Nye (2004a, 11) identifies culture – which he defines as the 'set of values and practices that create meaning for a society' – as one of three main resources – along with political values and foreign policies – on which a country's soft power rests. He argues that culture 'is transmitted through

personal contacts' (Nye 2004b, 42-43) and highlights student exchange programmes as important mechanisms for encouraging, enabling and organising these interactions. Not only do such programmes operate on grand scales, but many overseas students can secure 'positions where they can affect policy outcomes' (Nye 2004b, 43) once they have returned home. As former US Secretary of State Colin Powell noted, "I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated" (cited in Nye 2004b, 42) in the United States.

Morocco's educational ties to the European Union are longstanding and strong. For at least a decade, tens of thousands of Moroccan nationals – including the progeny of many of the kingdom's wealthiest and most influential families – have enrolled and studied at its universities and colleges. A significant portion of those who now comprise, and will shortly become, the country's most powerful citizens have been exposed to the ideals and values of the continent including its belief in democracy and valorisation of human rights. The great scale of this rotation, therefore, should enable the EU to implant its principles and standards deep within some of the most important sections of Moroccan society.

The strength of this link also seems to confirm another crucial aspect of Nye's thesis, namely, the power of Europe's attraction to many Moroccans. That thousands of them are drawn each year to study in France, Spain, Germany and Italy is a clear indication of the extent of the continent's appeal. Its ongoing allure should mean, therefore, that large parts of the kingdom's population are open and receptive to the EU's soft power. Indeed, from Nye's perspective, the country would appear to be almost perfectly primed to be acted upon in this way, to be predisposed to be affected by the EU's soft power and embrace the values and ideals that it is seeking to promote.

Despite the strength of these links, however, the EU has failed to exploit fully its considerable soft power over Morocco, and the unique opportunity presented by the Arab Spring, to bring about the country's political liberalisation. Nye's thesis can provide an explanation for this outcome by pointing to the EU's inconsistent behaviour and the unspecified timeframe over which soft power works. Nevertheless, the country's non-democratisation still challenges his theory's explanatory prowess by exposing its reasoning as permissive, linear, fatalistic and objectifying. Thus, the EU's failure is soft power's failure, meaning that Nye's thesis needs careful retheorising if it is to explain better Morocco's and the Maghreb's relations with Europe and ongoing political development.

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¹ The two largest EU exchange programmes open to Moroccan students are the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus schemes. The former was established in 2009 with the aims of enhancing the quality of 'European higher education'; promoting 'the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world'; and fostering 'intercultural understanding through cooperation with Third Countries' (European Commission 2015, 1). In 2014, the EU launched the Erasmus+ programme which has the additional goals of supporting 'Member States and higher education institutions in the EU and beyond in their internationalisation efforts'; and improving 'the quality of services and human resources in the EU and beyond through mutual learning, comparison and exchange of good practice' (European Commission 2017, 1). The Tempus scheme was set up 'to promote the reform and modernisation of higher education in the Partner Countries; ... enhance the quality and relevance of higher education to the world of work and society ...; ... increase the capacity of higher education institutions ... to cooperate internationally ...; ... foster the reciprocal development of human resources; [and] ... enhance mutual understanding between the peoples and cultures of the EU and ... Partner Countries' (European Commission 2013, 1).

² These figures have been generated by adding the number of each country's students in every EU member state together. In those member states in which the numbers of Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians is <5, then the amount is taken as 4. These totals also inform the percentages of each country's nationals studying in the European Union offered above (UNESCO 2016).

³ In 2005, Moroccans formed the largest contingent of foreign students studying in Spain. By 2014, they were the seventh biggest (UNESCO 2016).

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⁵ Akhannouch at the Université de Sherbrooke (Canada); Alami at New York University (US); Elalmy at the Université de Sherbrooke (Canada); Khalfi at the Institute for Advanced Study (US); and, Rebbah at the Université Laval (Canada) (Ministry of Culture and Communication, 2017).

⁶ The Partnership with Morocco was signed on 3 June 2013 (Council of the European Union, 2013, 4).

⁷ The New Response was published on 25 May 2011 and is the EU's review of its European Neighbourhood Policy framework following the start of the Arab Spring.

⁸ This ambition was ruled out by the European Council in 1987.

⁹ The EMP was established in November 1995 and Morocco signed its AA on 26 February 1996 (Holden 2009, 24).

¹⁰ The ENP was launched in May 2004 and Morocco concluded its AP on 9 December 2004. Holden, 'Security, Power or Profit?' (Holden 2009, 24).